

SCHORGER, A. W.

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WISCONSIN CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT, MADISON, WISCONSIN

BIRDS ACROSS THE SKY. By Florence Page Jaques. Illustrations by Francis Lee Jaques. Harper & Brothers, N.Y. 1942: 5½ x 8 in., xiv + 240 pp., 25 pls. \$2.50.

From the firm of Florence Page and Francis Lee Jaques, we have learned to expect art and artistry, charm and humor. In this, their latest effort, there is all of that. Ornithologists will find amusement in seeing how funny they sometimes appear to a layman, even a sympathetic one. Laymen will find enthusiasm and a very non-technical explanation of some of the strange antics of the trained "bird-man." No more understanding readers can be found than ornithologists' wives who, trained in other fields, have had ornithology and ornithologists thrust upon them with matrimony. They will confirm Mrs. Jaques' pictures of the patient efforts of the birdmen to educate which, nevertheless, leave the learner feeling well-nigh imbecilic and exasperated beyond measure. They will give joyful assent to her assertions that a richer and more absorbing life comes with a fuller acquaintance with the bird world. They will heartily endorse her descriptions of bird addicts as "some of the finest, most delightful and inspiring people."

Mrs. Jaques writes with facility, with a light philosophical touch, and with a sensitiveness not only to word sounds and meanings, but also to colors and situations. She differs from the bird census takers, perhaps also the taxonomists, by her acceptance of the bird as an individual, not as belonging to species or subspecies, tagged with absurdly long polysyllabic names. Her effort to describe sound and color effects is challenging, though it will convey varying meanings to different readers, as in "the gold-dark song" of the hermit thrush, or the "stainless sky."

Mr. Jaques has added greatly to the charm of the book with many delightful black and white drawings. Some are significant for their humor, others for sense of graceful movement, others for accurate characterization. His love of trees and his knowledge of them are beautifully exemplified in "Grey Fallodon" and "Deep Forest." As usual, Mr. Jaques' duck pictures are of especial interest.

Lovers of England and the English will find the chapter describing an English spring and the meeting with Lord Grey sharply disturbing when read in these harrowing times. Those who have read "Canoe Country" and "The Geese Fly High" will probably find Mrs. Jaques' sidelights on the American Museum of Natural History, and especially the description of her husband's method of planning the lovely exhibits, her joy in the dance of the woodcock, and the elation which the migration of the Blue and Snow Geese brought to her, of particular interest. "Birds Across The Sky" is not as even as the two preceding books, partly because it describes such various episodes and partly because it is handicapped by a "purpose to instruct." It lacks the lyrical quality of "Canoe Country" and the pure joyousness of "The Geese Fly High." In spite of these slight criticisms this book will bring gratification because of its many merits and because of the varied interests, the quick and sensitive feeling, and the joyful nature and warm sympathy of the author.—Helen Van Tyne.